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INSIDE

Obituaries ... NEWS4
Opinion ... NEWS6
GO! TODAY ... NEWS8

CU regents deny insurance to employees' gay partners

Wednesday's vote emphasizes morals, values, not benefit cost

By **Scott Thomsen**/The Gazette

ESTES PARK — Gay employees of the University of Colorado system will not be able to add their "domestic partners" to health-care policies provided by the university.

After informally supporting the idea months ago, the CU Board of Regents on Wednesday formally rejected a proposal to provide such benefits by a 7-1 vote. It was a vote that had more to do with individual morals, values and religious beliefs than the relatively low cost of expanding employee benefits.

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D-11 pass

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By **Wendy Y. Lawton**/The Gazet

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THURSDAY, JUNE 5, 1997

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But the makeup of those families is not defined.

The separate 5-1 votes — school board member Art Nutter in the minority and Vice President Sherry Butcher absent — put an end to a sometimes heated public debate and private, personal struggles by some board members to form moral opinions.

The decisions also ended a four-month campaign by Colorado for Family Values for a school rule that would do three things: affirm heterosexual marriage, promote abstinence and discourage promiscuity.

After the votes, CFV Chairman Will Perkins said he was pleased the board made good on two of the three requests made by his conservative Christian group. But in his mind, the meeting wasn't a total victory.

"To have our public school district say they can't affirm the institution of legal marriage without offending someone is ludicrous to me," he said.

But offending gay couples, single parents and others would be the result, some board members said Wednesday.

See D-11/NEWS5

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"To change the nature of what is a nuclear family, that's a marriage issue, not a benefits issue," Martin said. "This measure is focused at a very narrow class of individual."

Martin voted against the policy change along with regents Jerry Rutledge of Colorado

From NEWS1

The issue isn't merely one of offending families. School district attorney Sharon Thomas warned members at the meeting the CFV proposal could leave the district open to legal challenges or lawsuits because it could squelch teachers' free speech rights.

Thomas said any statement supporting heterosexual marriage could be seen as evidence against the district if people felt they were fired or not hired based on sexual orientation.

The emotional debate Wednesday mirrored a personal struggle for some board members, a struggle that played out in their hearts and minds since the CFV proposal surfaced in January.

Why? Because deciding if schools should teach students about the "right" kind of marriage is different than most board votes. It's not a decision based on budgets or education research. It's a decision based on values.

In interviews this week, many members said they pulled from personal experiences — childhoods, marriages, faith and moral compasses — to form opinions.

On one side is Nutter, who supported the CFV proposal. He said having his mother and father at home provided the perfect balance between love and discipline for him and his eight brothers and sisters — the same balance he said he and his wife give their six children.

Then there's his Catholic faith.

"The 10 Commandments say 'Honor thy mother *and* thy father,'" Nutter said this week. "Marriage is sacred. It's not a guy with a guy or a girl with a girl. If marriage isn't between a guy and a girl and God, it won't work."

On the other side are board members such as Bruce Doyle and Lyman Kaiser.

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Regents

From NEWS1

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He said the proposal was not designed to sanction the marriage of gay couples; it was intended to recognize changing

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D-11/Legal challenges feared

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In interviews, Doyle and Kaiser said, like Nutter, they believe a solid, caring marriage between a man and woman is what's best for kids. But they don't feel they should force their values on others.

For example, Kaiser said he believes strongly in democratic values ingrained in him during 25 years in the Air Force.

In a democracy, Kaiser said, people hold different opinions about religion, politics and what makes the best family. If parents have different ideas about marriage, they should be the ones to pass them on to their children.

Doyle agrees, for different reasons.

Growing up in Albuquerque, Doyle said he learned early to respect all people.

Promoting heterosexual marriage would run counter to this value, Doyle said, because it would be disrespectful and hurtful to gays and anyone not in a two-parent family.

Regents

From NEWS1

Council President Mike Martin said in supporting the proposal.

"It's the right thing to do," Martin said. "We must provide equal treatment to all our employees."

He said the proposal was not designed to sanction the marriage of gay couples; it was intended to recognize changing family situations.

"We are not asking you to endorse a gay or lesbian lifestyle, merely acknowledge changes in American society," he told the board. "America is changing. All of us have friends and family members living in unique situations we never would have imagined growing up."

According to CU estimates, 58 to 116 employees were expected to enroll same-sex partners or same-sex partners with children in university health-care plans. That would have cost $53,000 to $107,000 per year. Additionally, the university would have had to spend about $50,000 to update its payroll system to accommodate the changes.

More than 50 colleges, including public universities in at least 12 states, and more than 600 private companies such as Coors, The Walt Disney Co. and Apple Computers offer medical insurance to the same-sex domestic partners of their employees. At the University of Colorado at Boulder, the same-sex partners of students can get health care at the student-funded Student Health Center and same-sex partners of students and employees can get memberships at the student-run recreation center.

When the insurance changes were first proposed last year, a majority of the regents supported the plan, Sievers said. But hundreds of people have called or written the board to oppose the expansion of benefits, he said.

Additionally, several state legislators had threatened to mount a drive to cut university funding if the measure passed.

"We weren't breaking new ground," Sievers said. "But let's face it, people get excited about this issue. All you have to do is put 'sex' in the title."

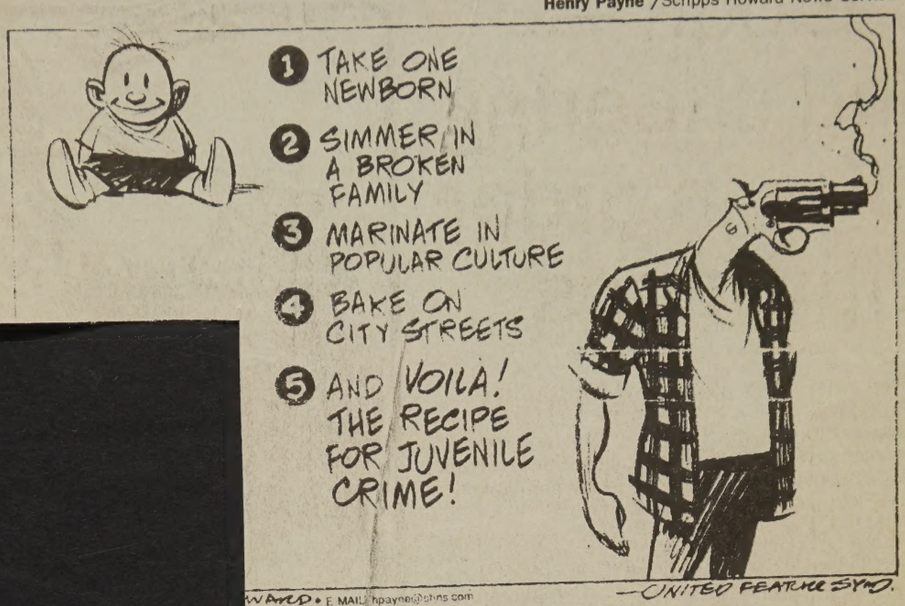
TELL IT TO THE GAZETTE

FIREARM SAFETY

Don't confuse gun control, crime control

When Congress reconvenes, a major piece of legislation awaiting it is the Juvenile Crime Control Act. This bill proposes

Henry Payne /Scripps Howard News Service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5 AND VOILA! THE RECIPE FOR JUVENILE CRIME!
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Obituaries ... NEWS4
Opinion ... NEWS6
GO! TODAY ... NEWS8

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"There is no doubt in my mind Colorado citizens are opposed to the measure before us," said Regent Jim Martin of Boulder.

"To change the nature of what is a nuclear family, that's a marriage issue, not a benefits issue," Martin said. "This measure is focused at a very narrow class of individual."

Martin voted against the policy change along with regents Jerry Rutledge of Colorado Springs, Henry Anton Jr. of Pueblo, Maureen Johnson of Boulder, Guy Kelley of Fort Collins, Norwood Robb of Littleton and Peter Steinhauer of Boulder. Regent Susan Kirk of Denver was the only member of the board to support the measure. Board President Bob Sievers, who supported the proposal, is allowed to vote only to break ties.

Under the proposal, which was sponsored by the CU Faculty Council and supported by the Staff Council and Student Forum, gay employees would have been able to sign an "affidavit of domestic partnership," then add their same-sex partners and any of their partners' children to their university health insurance plans.

As it stands, unmarried heterosexual partners of university employees likewise are not covered by university health plans.

But while heterosexual couples can marry and take advantage of university health benefits, homosexual couples can not, Faculty

See **REGENTS**/NEWS5

D-11 passes family policy

■ Board rejects requirement to stress teaching heterosexual marriage.

By **Wendy Y. Lawton**/The Gazette

The Colorado Springs School District 11 school board Wednesday night rejected a policy promoted by Colorado for Family Values that would have required teachers to promote the benefits of heterosexual marriage.

Instead, the board passed a rule saying parents are the primary source of guidance for kids about "marriage, procreation, sexuality and individual lifestyle."

The new policy won't change what students learn about sex or relationships in the region's largest school district.

But it does affirm the current lessons on abstinence. It also states sex-education lessons must include the advantages of raising children in "stable, committed, mature, long-term family relationships."

But the makeup of those families is not defined.

The separate 5-1 votes — school board member Art Nutter in the minority and Vice President Sherry Butcher absent — put an end to a sometimes heated public debate and private, personal struggles by some board members to form moral opinions.

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See **D-11**/NEWS5

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Gielinski's friends schedule benefit to establish memorial scholarship

The Gazette

Friends of Jacine Gielinski, the 22-year-old woman who was kidnapped, raped and killed April 29 in Colorado Springs, have organized a scholarship benefit in her memory.

Tiny Barge & The Big Chill, Thunder Mountain and B-Positive will provide live music at Rocky Mountain Greyhound Park from 6 to 10 p.m. Sunday.

A $10 donation is requested at the door. Food, microbrews and domestic beers will be sold. Gift certificates from restaurants, department stores and Air Force tickets will be auctioned.

The goal is to raise $10,000 to fund a scholarship in Gielinski's name through the University of Colorado Foundation. Gielinski was a student at CU-Colorado Springs.

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Springs man arrested in family's assault

By **Dennis Huspeni**
The Gazette

A Colorado Springs man was in jail Wednesday after allegedly stabbing his younger brother in the throat and assaulting his 69-year-old mother, according to El Paso County Sheriff's deputies.

Tracy Ray McCourt, 48, faces charges of attempted second-degree murder, first-degree assault and wrongs against an at-risk adult. He was being held late Wednesday in the El Paso County Criminal Justice Center on $50,000 bond.

Officials said the first attack took place late Friday when McCourt allegedly stabbed his brother, Robert Scott Ross, 44, according to an arrest affidavit. Ross was driven to Memorial Hospital that night. He was listed in good condition Wednesday, hospital officials said.

Police were called into the case Monday because the men's mother, Betty Helen Stanko, allegedly told doctors Ross had sustained the throat injury when he fell in the garage.

"Ms. Stanko stated they had not called the police because they didn't want to get us involved," the affidavit says.

But Monday she called sheriff's deputies and claimed McCourt "pushed her in the chest, knocking her against the door" on Sunday, the affidavit states.

The affidavit also says that during an interview with investigators, McCourt admitted stabbing his brother and pushing his mother.

McCourt is scheduled to appear in El Paso County Court Friday.

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Judge orders counseling for pedophile

By **Dennis Huspeni**
The Gazette

An admitted pedophile who volunteered at a Springs church was sentenced Wednesday to six years at ComCor, ordered to undergo counseling and forbidden from coming into contact with children.

Brett Lee Rowland, 32, pleaded guilty in April to two felony counts of sexual assault on a child by a person in a position of trust. He faced up to 32 years in prison on each count.

A sentence at ComCor means Rowland will have to live at the community corrections facility, get a job, and comply with all court-ordered counseling.

Rowland admitted he fondled two boys while baby sitting for them; one was 11 and the other 12.

He met and befriended the boys' parents while volunteering at Woodmen Valley Chapel. No abuse ever occurred at the church.

A mother of one of the victims said Wednesday she wanted Rowland to have some prison time but felt it was most important that he be kept away from